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ABSTRACT

Interviews with over 200 adults, both those who enjoy reading and dislike reading, were used to investigate the assumption that the impetus for lifelong enjoyment of reading most often occurs in the home before children enter school. Results indicate that parents who enjoy reading and encourage it produce families that enjoy reading. The information provided may cause teachers to pause and reevaluate decisions regarding what will predispose students to enjoy reading. Excerpts from interviews suggest that the families of those adults who read for pleasure were usually warm and loving and were families that tended to share experiences and spend time together reading and writing. There are adults, however, who describe very limited experiences with their family and yet admit to reading a great deal. Many of them were encouraged to read by a teacher, which supports the notion that school can be a shaper of adult interest in reading when family influence is limited. It is possible that if high school students are taught how to effectively select children's literature and how to read aloud, schools could influence the next generation of parents and increase the number of new lifelong readers for pleasure. (Samples of complete interviews and references are included.) (Author/JC)

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LOOKING TOWARD THE FAMILY:

CASE STUDIES OF LIFELONG READERS

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LOOKING TOWARD THE FAMILY:
CASE STUDIES OF LIFELONG READERS

ABSTRACT

Interviews of over 200 adult readers and not-readers was used to investigate the assumption that the impetus for literacy occurs in the home before children enter school. Results indicate that parents who read produce families that enjoy reading. The information provided may cause teachers to pause and reevaluate decisions regarding what will predispose students to become lifelong readers of literature.

Memories are shared that provide an illuminating look into reading habits that span three generations. The families that these adult readers describe are usually warm and loving and more important they are families that tend to share experiences. There are adults, however, who describe very limited experiences with their family and yet admit to being voracious readers. These people invariably tell about a teacher who "got them to read." If people's memories are to be believed and relied upon then the school is the shaper of the adult interests in reading only where family literary influence is limited.

The authors conclude that reading teachers need to be teaching effective selection and oral reading of children's literature to all ages in order to extend the school's influence to the parents of the next generation.

LOOKING TOWARD THE FAMILY:
CASE STUDIES OF LIFELONG READERS

In order to create lifelong readers for the 21st century, literary appreciation of children's fiction may well need to be included in secondary literature classes. These conclusions were reached after extensive indepth interviews of adult lifelong readers who indicate that parents who read produce families who enjoy reading. The memories that are shared in this paper provide an illuminating look into reading habits that span three generations. They also provide a basis for current enphasis on parent involvement in the reading process. The adults themselves explain their requests for certain changes in current practices--particularly those that plea for more information regarding literary content of the books to be chosen for children before they start school.

Teachers of English make an assumption that the teaching of literary appreciation will predispose students to become lifelong readers of literature. Libraries, book stores, and book clubs give evidence that there are indeed adults who do continue to read fiction by choice. But the question remains, does what literature teachers do, in fact, have this impact on adult attitudes toward reading? The respondants to these interviews suggest that one very important ingredient is being left out of literature classes in the senior high school. That is information on what, as parents, to look for in the selection of read-to material for the pre-school child.

Rationale

Prior research has investigated the perceptions of both teachers and students as to their goals in the study of literature. Library associations often sponsor studies of what adults read. But little has been done to delve into the explanations which adults of various ages and occupations give for having started on the road to lifelong reading. A study of adult readers of literature would seem to be important in order to discover why such reading is valued by some and what experiences are perceived as having nurtured such reading. It also seems important to make contact with those who do not read for pleasure to see if they can identify and experiences that led to this. The information provided may cause teachers to pause and reevaluate decisions regarding reading choices, instructional methods, and family influences.

Methodology

Adult readers were contacted through libraries, bookstores, and prior respondants in a variety of widely separated locations. A balance was desired between urban, suburban, and rural settings. Over 60 indepth interviews were taped, transcribed, and analyzed (Matheny, 1986). Preliminary conclusions were then used to structure shorter more pointed interviews and questionnaires. These were used in more diverse settings with adults who identified themselves as infrequent readers and as well as avid readers (Matheny & Lockledge, 1986).

Once the initial interviews were done and a pattern had emerged, an interview form was used with college undergraduates to bring them in contact with the process of learning to read. After these people (most of whom were

nontraditional students) had plumbed their own memories, they in turn interviewed other adults who were not involved either with their own educatoion or that of young children. They set out to find "not-readers" (as opposed to nonreaders). This proved much more difficult than finding the people who happily express their love of reading. But it was deemed necessary to find out if not-readers verified what the readers said. Did they recognize that supports for the reading habit were missing? Could they offer a solution?

Reader purposes were analyzed according to the conceptual descriptions provided by Louise Rosenblatt which include having as full and aesthetic an experience as possible given the capacities, sensibilities, preoccupatons and memories brought to the transaction (1978). One on one interviews were scheduled following the recommendations of Culp (1977) that chance remarks may be more revealing than a response to a direct question.

Results

In these interviews across the country, it was found that many adults mention the beginnings of reading and liking to read happening first in the family. It seems that parents who read produce families that enjoy reading. So many adults seem to feel that their first interest in reading was sparked by someone reading to them at home. Sometimes it was Gramma or Aunt Jane who read Bible stories, sometimes Mother with bedtime stories, often it was siblings that they remember reading aloud to them.

> "I remember being read to. It was a pleasent experience, It was enriching and gave me awareness. We read Charles Dickens and the Bobbsy Twins. My Aunt Emily read alot to us. In the winter eventings everyone read."

"I thought being read to was fascinating. It increased my imagination because it gave me so many new things to think about."

"I read quite a bit as a little child and I remember my mothr reading to me. We had a good library in the town where I grew up. I also remember receiving books for my birthday and Christmas. For some readon or another, I particularly remember some childhood poety books that I loved. I still have them, but they are pretty worn!"

The families that these adult readers describe are usually warm and loving and more important they are families that tend to share experiences. When the work they all work together. When they play, everyone plays. And when they read or write , everyone reads and writes.

"I wasn't read to when I was little because my mother couldn't read or write English. I read to my mother and taught the English language to her. My father had beautiful handwriting. We used to practice together, writing stories about Norway."

"I really wouldn't say we spent a lot of time doing reading or writing together as a family. Though, we did all gather around the kitchen table after supper to do our homework while Dad read and Mom did the dishes. I guess you could say that that has influenced my attitude on my family. Meaning, after supper at our house, time was spent on homework with my wife and myself helping our girls with their studies. It was family time spent doing something constructive."

"I remember reading signs out of the car window whenever the family drove someplace. My parents wanted me to read and bought me books all the time."

"I used to read all the time and my father read to us kids every night. He would read children's books. I loved to listen to his voice! My favorite book was "The Sleepy Puppy." My mother left us when I

was only a year and a half so my father was very close to all of us kids and we spent a great deal of time together reading every night."

"My favorite memory about reading was when my mother would gather all the five children around the rocking chair and read to us. This was out nightly entertainment. I remember looking forward to being read to and it was fun."My father was an avid reader and I remember sitting on his lap while he read the newspaper to me. My mother read typical bedtime stories. My favorite was "The Little Engine That Could" which, in a sense, still holds my philosophy for life."

These adults who describe these strong family influences tend not to remember the beginnings of reading in school. They may or may not remember a teacher who read to them, but they sometimes remember a particular teacher with great fondness.

"I learned to read in the first grade. I remember my teacher, Miss Garlnad who was very kind, very patient. I credit her for starting my love for reading."

"I remember Nona Rasmusson, but that was forty five or fifty years ago."

"Mrs. Rusch gave me interesting boooks to read in the fifth grade; mythology, mysteries, and autobiographies."

"The teacher that I remember helped me to discover reading was Rosie Tagart. I don't remember what exactly she did but I do know one thing, she taught me to read in English and she helped open a whole new world for me."

In exploring situations that adults of varying ages and cultures identified as nonconducive to a lifelong enjoyment of reading, many remembered their fear or dislike of oral reading in elementary school But it seems that when there is a

strong family bond and strong family influences, the influence of the school is relatively unimportant. Most of these people did well enough in elementary school and have few complaints about those early years. Many describe in detail things that they particularly enjoyed. Nevertheless one does not feel that this was the prime influence in shaping the adult they became. They do have comments to make on the fabric of life today and how it affects readers.

> "There wasn't a television in our home so we relied on books for our source of entertainment. Growing up without a television had a great influence on my love for reading. That is proably why my own children do not enjoy reading."

> "I don't enjoy reading at all. The family never read together and I suppose this may have something to do with my attitude now about reading. I liked being read to and enjoyed listening to the teacher because she read so well. My reading ability has improved since high school because of what I have to do at work. But I still have inhibitions about reading."

Those adults who are admitted not-readers almost always describe families that did things other than reading. If they shared with parents, it was usually something physical such as chores or sports.

> "I don't recall ever reading or writing together as a family, but I do remember many other things we did together. We went sleigh riding together, and ice skating. We dcorated the Christmas tree together and went to family gatherings, school programs, and ball games. I've never though about it before, but I suppose it may have something to do with my not enjoying to read."

> "We went fishing, we spent holidays together like Christmas and Thanksgiving. We always had a big deal on branding days. But we didn't sit around and read."

"As a family it wasn't reading and writing we would do but we were always going to the woods for snowmobiling, chopping wood, putting up hay, or whatever else needed to be done."

There was never "time" to read as a child and there still is not as an adult. Many mention guilt feelings about reading.

"Once in awhile when my babies are napping and my husband is in the timber working, I have a little time, but never enough to read."

"I really feel that my time is better spent doing other things than reading, and I feel guilty when I take some time off to read."

These adults also describe dull, uninteresting, unchallenging school situations. They tend not to remember much good about school and much about lack of success. They didn't care, their parents didn't care and they felt that the teachers didn't care. School was something to be endured so that you could go out to recess.

I don't remember much back then except what I already told you. I didn't like reading even back then. The books were boring and it as the same thing every day. I don't remember much positive about growing up or any positive reading experiences, unless you mean how happy my ma was when I finally was able to read a whole chapter from our Bible for the first time."

"My third grade teacher caused me not to like reading. She always made me feel like I wasn't reading good enough. She had a way of making me feel bad about the way I read. My first grade teacher make me feel really good about reading. She always gave stickers to put on my shirt for good reading."

"In fourth grade the teacher kept a gigantic paddle sort of shaped like a bread board with holes drilled in it hanging by her desk. If you weren't quiet or you did something to disrupt the classroom or sometimes if you just got on her nerves whe sould smack you with this board! If some of us were slow at a subject and she got

impatient whe would rap it on our knuckles. Since I was such a slow reader, I got many sore knuckles. She was always telling me how stupid I was. Because of my status in the gang, I had to show it didn't matter what she said or not cry or show any tears. This would have been the ultimate in humiliation. Reading was hard for me."

"My sixth grade teacher didn't think I could read well enough, so she made me go to an aid for a remedial reading group. It was horrible, and boring, because I'd already covered the same book the year before, and I didn't see why I was in a dummy group when I got A's in all of my other subjects."

"I know I didn't like to read but I'm not sure that it was because of a teacher. They definitely didn't make me <u>like</u> it."

"My teachers discouraged me when it came to reading, because I was a little slower than the rest. So I just came to hate reading."

But there are adults who describe very limited experiences with their family and yet admit to being voracious readers. These people invariably tell about a teacher who "got them to read." Usually they can describe what the teacher read to them, what the teacher said to them, who else was there in the class. It seems that when family influences toward literacy are not strong, the school has a chance to make a big difference.

"In seventh grade, however, my teacher instilled in me a love of reading and experiencing history. Biographies are a great favorite of mine. They portray the history and geneology of a person just like a country."

"Reading was never a positive experience for me until I got to the 8th grade, when we finally quit moving for awhile and I gained some self-confidence. Prior to that I always felt as though I really could not read. It was in the 8th grade that my teacher finally gave me the confidence that I needed to realize that I could To this day I like to read, but never in front of a group of people. It still makes me very

nervous Maybe if some of my elementary teachers would have known how often we moved, they would have understood how scared I was to stand in front of a group of strangers and read."

"My seventh grade teacher, Mrs. McKenney, really got me involved in reading. She used to buy books for us."

"We had to do book reports for an eighth grade history teacher. I read Balboa The Jungle Boy books. They're all I enjoyed. When I ran out of those, I was out of luck."

And what do these lifelong readers read? They read newspapers, magazines, current best sellers, mystery novels, and publications that have to do with whatever they do for a living. Most women read romances and historical fiction, men often prefer nonfiction. They read because they like to read--the selection of what to read often depends on other interests and varies between individuals and for particular individuals depending on current circumstances.

"I read mysteries, westerns, adventure, new novels, and almost all the magazines on the stands."

"I enjoy reading if I'm interested in the material and it can be put to some use. I'm not interested in novels. They don't seem to serve a purpose."

"Growing up in a rural setting I read books about the outdoors, not a lot of literature. I get the National Geographic and the Smithsonian."

Adult readers mention with fondness the books they read or had read to them when very young that sparked their imagination. Although the mojority of these respondants are not college graduates, they certainly intend the best for their children. They sometimes voice a request that children's literature be included within the literature appreciation curriculum in the secondary school.

"High school teachers should have a responsibility to teach about children's literature and how to share a love of reading with children."

"I absolutely think the secondary teachers ought to teach children about literature. There is such a delightful array of children's books today that teachers and their students could have a wonderful time exploring ideas, art, quality and the dynamics of children's literature as a vehicle to enhance reading. We know that the amount of leisure time spend reading is directly related to children's reading comprehension, the size of their vocabularies and the gains in their reading ability."

"If secondary teachers chose interesting material, maybe students would gain more interest in reading and would also enjoy reading with young children."

"I think secondary teachers should teach children's literature, because I think it all begins at home! Parents have far more influence at an early age. I believe this strongly."

Conclusions

These descriptions of specific memories of early reading experiences can form the basis of recommendations regarding practices that might spark an interest in reading that will carry into the next millenium.

We often hear teachers decry the fact that they cannot override the strong influence of the family and they cannot overcome familial or parental neglect. If peoples memories are to be believed and relied upon then somewhat the opposite is the case. When the family exerts a strong literacy influence, the school can do little to interfere. But when the family does not have this influence, then the school is the shaper of the adult interests.

The school of the future may need to accept individual differences among families and use appropriate supportive strategies with parents to develop

positive influences toward reading. These parents need the school's cooperation and support just as much as the school needs them.

But most important the school has the responsibility to reach the adult community through the adults the secondary students will become. Reading teachers need to be teaching effective oral reading of and selection of children's literature to all ages in order to extend the school's influence to the parents of the next generation.

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ADDENDA

Samples of abreviated interview form with responses.

INTERVIEWING ADULTS ABOUT FOUNDATIONS OF LITERACY

Demographic Information:

Age: 24

Area of United States: Colordao

College Major: Computer Science

As a child lived in Ft. Collins,Colorado, a city.

Size of Elementary School: Larger than 100 students
Size of Elementary Classes: about 25, open classroom

Interview Questions:

1. What if anything do you read these days other than what is required for your work or schooling? Do you enjoy reading?

> I love to read, especially the classics, but I also enjoy reading current modern fiction best sellers.

2. Do you remember reading or being read to as a child? Describe it. Do you remember specific titles or instances? Any particular reactions?

> I remember my mother reading to me as child. We would sit together on the sofa and she would read. It was a warm, safe experience for me. I particularly loved "uncle Wiggily" books, and still think about "the gentleman rabbit".

3. Do you have memories of a teacher who made you really enjoy reading or hate it as the case may be?

> I remember going to summer school one year. I didn't want to go and was really unhappy with my mother for her insistence. I can't remember learning any math, which I was there for, but I do remember that the teacher read, A Wrinkle In Time to the class. I loved the book. It made quite an impression because I always associate summer school with that book.

4. Do you have memories of your family doing things together? Was one of these reading or writing? Do you connect this to your attitude now?

> I do not specifically remember doing any reading or writing together as a family. I do remember that whenever I was sick I would look forward to my father coming home from work at night because he would come to my room and read to me or play a game. My brother, who is five years older than I am, was and is an avid reader.

5. Do you read a daily paper? News magazine? Do you remember reading such factual material as a child? What were you reactions? Did you like it? Did you feel satisfied with the information gathered?

Interview Cont.

Yes, I do read a newspaper but not necessarily everyday. Occasionally I read Time Magazine. As a child the only factual material that I enjoyed was "National Geographic Magazine". I have always enjoyed reading about people and places.

6. Do you read biography now? Did you as a child? If you were to read a biography now who would you choose to read about?

I don't normally read biographies now. As a child I read every book I could find about Abraham Lincoln. Now I Would read about Mozart because I recently saw the movie "Amadeus" and would like to know if the material was factual.

7. Do you remember learning to write? Did you enjoy writing? Letters perhaps or little stories? How did you feel about writing in school? What do you suppose made you feel that way?

I do remember learning to write. I always tried to be neat. I loved to write stories. I liked writing in school in hopes that the teacher would like what I had written. I don't remember any teacher telling me that my writing was particularly good. I answered an ad one time for a writing school. They sent a prompt and I had to write a story to go with it. I received an immediate answer saying that I did have talent and for X number of dollars I could go to their school. I later learned that everyone who answered the ad received the same reply.

8. Were any members of your family letter writers? Was this held as a skill that one ought to have?

My Mother and Aunt are wonderful letter writers. I liked to write to my Aunt because I knew that I would receive an answer within a few days. When my brother joined the Army, my mother insisted that someone in the family write to him everyday. Writing thank you notes was also something that my mother taught us to do. All of us still write as often as possible.

9. Do you think secondary teachers ought to teach about children's literature and how to share a love of reading with young children? Would this help to make us a nation of readers?

I think that if children don't read by the time they are in the secondary grades they probably never will. Primary teachers should encourage reading not only as a valuable tool but also an enjoyable activity. Somehow children need to be taught that reading is a admirable skill not just an activity for "nerds". I think that teachers should read to their classes everyday strictly for the student's enjoyment.

10. Is there anything else you want to tell me?

I feel lucky to have grown-up in a family of readers and in an atmosphere that placed a high value on reading. My husband grew up in a family of non-readers and is himself a non-reader. Unfortunately, after a certain age, it seems that a non-reader can not learn to appreciate a good book. I also feel that while teachers can make a positive impact on children, the atmosphere at home and the attitudes of the parents make the ultimate difference between readers and non-readers.

INTERVIEW PROJECT

Demographic Information:

Age: 68 Nationality: American (white)
U.S. - Midwesterner
College: Business School
As a child: lived mainly in one place
The place called home was: a small town
Size of elementary school: larger than 100
Size of elementary classes: about 20

Interview Questions:

What, if anything, do you read these days other than what is required for your work?
I read mysteries, westerns,adventures, new novels, and almost all the magazines on the stands.
Do you enjoy reading?
Yes, very much.

Do you remember reading or being read to as a child? Describe it.
No, I wasn't read to because my mother couldn't read or write English. (She was from Norway). I read to my mother and taught the English language to her.

Do you have memories of your family doing things together?
Yes
Was one of these things reading or writing?
My father had beautiful handwriting. We used to practise together, writing stories about Norway.
Do you connect this to your attitude now?
Yes.

Do you have any memories of a teacher who made you really enjoy reading?
Yes, my first grade teacher. I think it was because I was just learning English then and was very excited about it. I remember going to the library and trying to read everything I could.

Do you read a daily newspaper?
Yes, one or more.
News magazine?
Newsweek.
Do you remember reading such factual material as a child?
Yes, my father suscribed to a news magazine (Time, I think),and I always read that.
Did you like it?
Yes.
Did you feel satisfied with the information gathered?
As far as I remember.

Do you read biography now?
No, I don't really enjoy them.
Did you as a child?
No.
If you were to read a biography now who would you choose to read about?
Winston Churchill.

Do you remember learning to write?
Yes, I started right out writing in cursive. I never did learn how to print.
Did you enjoy writing?
Yes. I liked writing stories as a kid. I now write about five letters a week, which <u>are</u> stories in themselves.
What do you suppose made you feel this way about writing?
Probably back to my first grade teacher and my father. I've always loved to write; that's why I have such beautiful handwriting.

Were any members of your family letter writers?
No.
Was this held up as a skill that one ought to have?
No.

Do you think secondary teachers ought to teach about children's literature and how to share a love of reading with young children?
Yes, definately.
Would this help to make us a nation of readers?
I think it would.

Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?
When my kids were little I used to read to them all the time. Now I read to my grandchildren and listen while they read to me. I also enjoy the letters I get from them.

ADULT INTERVIEW

Personal Information:

Age: 35
Sex: Male / Electrical Engineer
Nationality: American (Irish, Norwegian, and Heinz 57)
grew up in the midwest
As child lived in one place--grew up on farm
The place called home was a very small town
Size of Elementary School was under 100
Size of elementary class was under 20

Interview:

1) What do you read, other than what is required of you at work? Do you enjoy reading?

I read the paper every day, although I can't say I'm really crazy about The Rapid City Journal--but, I read it anyway. I also read USA Today, I suppose about twice a week or so. There's usually a copy of that laying around the office and I look through it pretty often.

As far as reading books, I really like to read when I have the time. I don't think I could say there is one specific type of novel I prefer. I read lots of different stuff. I don't read those real soap-opera love stories, but otherwise I like just about everything. I really enjoy reading history, even if it's been embellished a bit, if you know what I mean. If it is true, or based on a true story, I am more interested in it. But, sometimes I can really sink my teeth into some good trashy stuff--like Steven King or something like that. So, I guess to answer your question, yeah, I like to read.

2) Do you remember reading or being read to as a child?

Not much. Oh, I guess my granny used to read to me when I was real little and would be at her house visiting. My mom may have read to me a few times, but nothing that really stands out in my memory. I think the most I was read to was in school, when the teacher would read outloud to us. I always loved that. But, no, I wasn't read to much at home.

3) Do you have any memory of a teacher who really made you love or hate reading?

Yeah, my fourth grade teacher made us do a book report every week, and I hated her because of it. Maybe it didn't make me hate reading, but I hated her. Plus, I guess I'd have to say that at least it slowed me down on my reading. The thing that really flipped me out was that she didn't really seem to care what you thought about the book, but rather how you put your words down, ya know? Red pen all over my paper saying, this sentence sounds confusing, what do you mean, misspelled, blah, blah, blah. In fact, one time I got so mad that I made up the title and author of a book. I still remember it: The Sundown Cowboy. I made up this whole report, and really was careful about my spelling and all that bull. Well, I get my paper back and she writes "You are improving in your reports. This is much better." Ha! What a stupid teacher, I thought, she doesn't even know I made this whole thing up. I never did it again cuz I was afraid I'd get caught, but I think I always felt a little better than her after that.

4) Do you read biography now, or did you as a child? If you were to read a biography today, who would you read about?

No, I didn't as a child, but once in a blue moon I do now. For a while, I had a real thing for Martin Luther King, and read tons on him. I haven't done that for a while. I guess if I had to pick anyone now it would probably be John Lennon and that dragon lady who was his wife. That really intrigues me.

5) Do you remember learning to write? Did you enjoy it?

All I really remember is making circles on the paper. Yeah, it was okay. I don't really remember too much about learning to write, or my feelings either way.

6) Do you write letters to anyone now? Do you remember your family writing letters or making it seem important to do so?

I write to my family, but my mom would tell you not enough. And I write to a couple college buddies now and then. One thing my mom and dad really stressed was writing thankyou letters, and to this day I always, I mean ALWAYS write a thankyou letter. Boy, that was my mom's thing--I mean, say it was Christmas, and my grandma and grandpa came to the house to spend a few days with us? Well, they brought gifts along, and you opened them right there with them watching, and told them oh thanks, I love it, you're the greatest, and all that? You STILL had to write them a thankyou letter! I thought it was sorta stupid, but now I think it was a good idea, because nothing torks me off like not getting a thankyou letter from someone. I mean it--you are off my gift list if you do that to me.

7) Do you think a secondary teacher ought to teach about children's literature and how to share of love of reading with young children?

No way, no sir--forget that. I don't think any high school kid's gonna want to learn about kiddie literature--babies' books. It would be too embarrassing to have to carry Dr. Seuss or Mother Goose down the hall. I just don't think kids that age would get into it or appreciate it. Even if they did kinda want to learn about it, they'd never admit it. I think it's a dumb idea to tell you the truth.

8) Is there anything you'd like to say that I haven't asked you?

No. Well, maybe that I guess I think elementary teachers should read to their kids more--just for the fun of it. No papers to write, no questions to answer, no class discussion on the "meaning" of it all. I really do remember that teacher reading to us, and I loved it. You could have at least part of the school day when you could just kick back and enjoy, and not have to react or anything. I think I probably learned a lot of stuff that way, but I wasn't ask to put it down in words--I could just enjoy it. More teachers should do that.

The subject of my interview was a forty year old (handsome) male caucasian who shall remain nameless. He was also unwilling, stubborn and busy reclining on the floor- watching Papa Smurf.

The interview and the struggle to get it is as follows:

Me: Will you let me interview you for my language arts class?

He: (looking suspicious) Why?

Me: Because you're the only adult I know who isn't crazy and or a college student. So, how about it?

He: No.

Me: Why?

He: Because you're crazy and a college student.

I didn't have an answer for this one. So, at this point I sat firmly on his chest. I had my notebook in one hand and a piece of beard in the other. The interview began:

Me: Ok. Let's get down to business. I ask- you listen and answer.

He: See, I told you. You ARE crazy and HEAVY.

Me: I don't want to hear that. I want to know: what do you read? And, I want to know why do you read what ever it is you do read. (Power was going to my head. I gave his beard a tug.)

He: Ow! I read airplane magazines bacause you won't let me read Play Boy.

Me: Cute. Do you remember being read to as a child? If you can remember that far back, will you please tell me about it?

He: Yes. My mother read to us every night. I liked it and looked foreward to it. I remember sitting on the arm of the chair near the wood stove, tring to keep warm. Nobody sat on my chest back then.

Me: What was your favorite book and why?

He: Mowgli. Because it was very interesting and fun.

Me: Do you have memories of your family doing things together?

He: Sure. I'm not that old. I remember camping trips, Christmas in the country at my grandparents, and a trip we took to Chicago. I remember doing a lot of things with my family. With eight brothers and sisters, you can't escape. Like now.

Me: You're getting off of the subject. And if you want me to get off of you, pay attention. Now, did you ever have a teacher that made you love or hate reading?

He: No, I don't think so. My mother made me enjoy reading. She also made me eat my peas.

Me: Do you remember reading factual material as a child?

He: Ya. A sexology book. My parents thought it was hidden, or maybe they made me think it was hidden. I memorized that book. It was about that thick. (He held up his fingers to show about three inches.) Is there anything you want to know? (The last sentence was more of a leer.)

Me: Later. Do you read biographys now?

He: Nope.

Me: Did you as a child, when you weren't reading hidden books?

He: Yup. I read Amelia Erhert and any other book I could find about pilots.

Me: Now that I know every thing I always wanted to know about reading, how about writing. How did you feel about writing stories in school?

He: It was a pain is the - - -. The same feeling I'm getting in my chest right now.

Me: What made you feel that way?

He: I had a hard time expressing myself when I was younger. I don't have that problem anymore. GET OFF!

It was time to call it quits. I knew when the interview was over.